

Director of Church Ministries Report

How does one effectively reflect on 2020. It's a question that doesn't seem to deserve a question mark! Each of us have many stories that piled up into what might be the most memorable year in recent memory. Though 2021 might position itself to compete, we'll see. One of the sentiments that I heard often near the end of 2020 was something along these lines. Forget that year. Glad it's over, never have to think about 2020 again. Perhaps you've had similar thoughts. While I very much understand the sentiment, I wonder just how much looking one has to do in order to see the beauty that 2020 held.

My mind is drawn to the Revelation of Jesus Christ, that book at the end of our Bible. Not in an 'end of the world' sense, but more in the understanding that things are not always as they seem. For many of us, 2020 seemed like a year of reckoning. The pandemic has forced change everywhere. Schools shut down and then reopened with unusual rules. Children spent significant time at home, many in healthy environments and others in places that caused harm. Too many of our elders were lost to us too soon, due to contracting the disease caused by COVID-19. Loved ones died for other reasons and the painful realities of constrained funerals have resulted in significant struggle. Churches closed physically, adjusted to an online world, created a huge swath of ministry engagement, adjusted again and again.

People lost jobs, businesses closed or suffered. Others prospered, and when we saw that success we struggled with our emotions. Racial tension rose to new heights. Many of us have learned to pay attention to the significant realities our BIPOC (black, indigenous and people of color) brothers and sisters face in an entirely new way. Such was 2020, and so much more. A year of reckoning, maybe. But if Revelation has taught me anything, it's that things are not always as they seem. Jesus is always pressing into our reality. The Spirit of our Lord is constantly at work. As I reflect on this past year, the moments of beauty that I keep encountering are an evidence of that truth. I hope that through what I share here you will see it too. It's my belief that as we see this beauty of Christ working in and through us, we will experience something like 'steady.'

My work among the churches of MBCM is pretty varied. One of those spaces is supporting pastors. In the MBCM family, we are blessed! I try to avoid playing the comparison game, but when I fail in that effort, I can't help but think we're winning. Our pastors are Jesus followers, committed to their calling, deeply compassionate and focused on the mission given to us by our Lord. It continues to be a joyful experience for me to connect with these men and women. One space of that work are pastor groups. In 2020, we launched two new pastor groups for pastors in and near



ASSEMBLY 2021

Winnipeg. These are groups of pastors that meet periodically to share the beauty and burdens of ministry and pray for each other. It's a joy to see these talented people spend time investing in their colleagues. It's really beautiful to see, I wish each of you could be a first hand witness! Another area of my work is caring for pastors in moments of difficulty. Churches aren't always easy places to work. The pandemic has certainly amplified some of the challenges. Here's one story of pastor support that brings me tears of joy. It's a story from just two days before the time of this writing. A young pastor is going through a very difficult time, not of their making. Circumstances have contributed to a lot of pain. I 'sat' with this pastor over a zoom call, visiting and praying together. An idea was generated. What if we were to invite a few pastors from around the province to spend an hour a week with this pastor. It seemed like a good idea. At 4:18pm on a Tuesday, I sent an invitation to the first four pastors that came to mind. At 9:28am the next morning, the last pastor replied with the same enthusiasm of the first three. They just jumped in with a care that really hit me. By that Wednesday afternoon, they were meeting with this pastor who needed support. Of course, we all need support and I know that's what will happen as they continue to meet. Do you see the beauty?

Another space of our work is supporting churches. Pastoral searches, HR realities, crisis support, board development, navigating challenging conversations, etc. I'm always honored and humbled to be invited and welcomed into the internal workings of a local church. Our churches are full of Jesus followers. People who are deeply compassionate, committed to their community and devoted to the mission given by our Lord. It's been a joy to get to know so many more this past year. Here's a

story that is beautiful to me. As it happens in churches, Manitou Christian Fellowship found themselves in need of a pastor. One question that any such church has during a pandemic is, how in the world do we navigate this now? While MCF has very competent leaders who would work this out well, they connected with me to look for insight. I knew that Westwood Community Church had worked through the entirety of a hiring process during the pandemic and thought connecting these sister churches might offer the right kind of support. The folks at Westwood were delighted to be able to share their experience and in that way join the work of another MBCM church. When moments like these happen, I think everyone benefits and I can't help but think I see our Lord smile. I see something beautiful there.

A third area of focus for my work is spiritual health and theology. We hosted three Nuts & Bolts events in 2020, which are times for pastors and leaders to gather, be equipped, inspire and support one another. One space of need that became apparent in 2019 was the care and inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons. While we have many churches who have made great strides in this important work, we've often struggled with how to engage in healthy conversation that continued to honor the convictions that we share in our confession. We engaged with PostureShift, an event designed to equip churches for this very work. Unfortunately, the pandemic has tangled our plans for 2020. We anticipate engaging with PostureShift in September of 2021, even if gathering as a large group is not possible. I'm grateful for our Provincial Faith and Life Team in their ongoing work in the area of spiritual health and theology. The PFLT has always been a critical factor in the credentialing process for pastors, and that continues to be the case. 2020 marked the



ASSEMBLY 2021

year that the PFLT began to focus and work a bit more in the theological and practical workings of churches within MBCM. Here's a story. River East Church began a conversation, as churches do. They wanted to connect with LGBTQ+ persons in a new way and began a conversation about how to accomplish this. The church invited MBCM staff to be a part of that conversation. As the nature of this conversation is challenging and has numerous implications, the MBCM board was engaged in this work from the beginning. While the PFLT was kept informed of this conversation along the way, the PFLT became more directly involved at the end of 2020. We continue to engage in dialogue with REC's leadership to further understand their standpoint and how it relates to our Confession of Faith and potential implications. This was never going to be easy. If I may be so bold, I make the following appeal to all of us, regardless of our varying perspectives. May the kindness, patience and gentleness that mark our relationships with each other not perish on the landscape of a difficult conversation. The beauty in this story may be more challenging to see. I remain convinced that the Holy Spirit will generate that beauty.

An area of work that is contained within those already mentioned is crisis management. Crisis comes in all shapes and sizes. Churches face crises. Pastors face crises. Boards. All of us! It's not every year though, that everyone faces the same crisis. That is where we are today. We all face the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and the many implications and points of impact that spin out from our current global reality. Our work in this crisis has been focused on primarily two questions. First, how do we help our pastors and leaders survive and thrive in an alien environment? Second,

how can we help them navigate the changing landscape? These questions don't have straightforward or simple answers. Much of my work has been listening and learning right alongside everyone else. Our first Nuts & Bolts of 2020 was with Carolyn Klassen, in an effort to generate resilience tools among the participants. Everyone has needed more ways to bounce back from the hits that keep coming. We have worked hard to generate timely communication to help navigate restrictions and pressures. No doubt we haven't been perfect in this regard. I look forward to the days when we can remember what this pandemic was like and what we learned from it. For now, I trust that we will continue to lean on our Savior and navigate faithfully.

I hope you have been able to see some of the beauty that I see in our MBCM family in this past year. May that be a factor in our ability to remain steady. But may the primary factor be Jesus. Back to the Revelation of Jesus Christ. John's writing compels me to know that Jesus, the sacrificial lamb, is on the throne. The only throne that matters. Revelation tells me that Jesus wins. And when it seems like that's not the case right now, Jesus whispers in my ear, "things are not what they seem." Ah yes, He is our steady.

Jason Dyck